MODERNIST FUNDAMENTALISM

J·R·P·SCLATER

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J. R. P. SCLATER, D.D.

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MODERNIST FUNDAMENTALISM
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FOREWORD

THE present quarrel, between so-called Fundamentalism and Modernism, is unquestionably doing damage to evangelical religion. Why this hoary dispute should have reappeared with such youthful vigour is a little difficult to understand. We might have thought that the historical study of the Bible had established, for good and all, the idea of a progressive revelation. Doubtless some modernists are responsible for the fear, which has become dominant in many devout minds, that the Ark of God is in danger; but it is distressing to discover that there are still those who think that a reverent study of the text, the authorship and the date of the Scriptural books, can ever undermine their religious authority. In point of fact, grave-minded criticism has retained the position of the Bible, as the Regulator of faith and practice, for an innumerable company of thinking people, for whom the theory of mechanical, verbal inspira-

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tion had made the Bible to be almost meaningless; and it has done the added service of enthroning, more manifestly, Jesus Christ as the Lord of the Book. A scientific study of scripture, which produces results like these, is not the enemy, but the friend, of evangelic faith; and if they will only perceive that this is what, in fact, the research of scholars has accomplished, many hesitating and anxious people will be delivered from their fears. The object of this little book is to reassure them that this is the case.

The chapters, which compose the book, were originally—although in a different shape—delivered as evening sermons in Old St. Andrew's Church, Toronto, and subsequently appeared as articles in *The New Outlook,* to whose editors I am indebted for permission to publish them in this form.

Old St. Andrew's Church, Toronto.
1926.

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MODERNIST FUNDAMENTALISM

MODERNIST FUNDAMENTALISM

FUNDAMENTALISM: WHAT IS IT?

IT is singularly unfortunate that, at a time when the Church ought to be concentrating on its urgent and positive tasks, it should be agitated, and its forces dissipated, by the re-emergence of the strife between the Fundamentalist and the Modernist—to use the popular, but misleading titles. We might have thought that this debate was over. It belongs properly to the closing quarter of the last century: and by this time Protestantism should have adjusted itself to what has been discovered to be true both in physical and Biblical enquiry; and should have known that the foundation is only thereby displayed as more abundantly secure. But it seems that we have reimported something of this venerable controversy from our neighbors to the south; al-

though we wish that they could have kept it for home consumption. And thus it becomes necessary to reassure our people that evangelicalism is only strengthened when it is liberal: indeed, that it can continue to exist only when it is allied with that which is true.

Christianity is the religion of redemption through Jesus Christ. Its two cardinal texts are, "God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him might not perish, but have everlasting life," and "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." A "Modernism," which denies that, is not Modernism, but ancient heresy; and no liberal evangelical, or serious-minded Higher Critic, departs from these basic positions in the least degree. The cardinal doctrines of Christianity are the divinity of our Lord and the saving power of His Cross: and the "Modernism" which has a claim on the attention of serious men, holds with unhesitating hand to these fundamentals. At the same time, it is only reasonable to insist on the duty of a scholarly enquiry into the date and authorship of the Biblical books and to face the fact that, in many places, the text in the

original tongue is all but incomprehensible and requires the aid of scholarship before we can know what it was that the author wrote: and a man is faithless to truth if he does not accept the assured results of such enquiry. As a result, it has come to be realized that the revelation of God, given in Scripture, is progressive, culminating in Jesus Christ: that the Bible is the written religious authority, but that it contains the political, economic and scientific ideas of the times in which its books were composed; that, starting from these ideas, patient men have been led by the Spirit of Truth into clearer ideas of God's working and will in the physical and social realm. The modernist would say that the scientific ideas of the early Hebrew race are no more binding upon us than their views on polygamy; also, that we have advanced to an evolutionary conception of the world is no more perturbing than that we have advanced to a monogamous view of the state. And, further, he would maintain, and maintain with reason and with passion, that such views upon the Bible do not touch religion in the slightest, nor affect, except to glorify Him the more, the Church's

one foundation, which is Jesus Christ our Lord.

As against that position stands the Fundamentalist, entrenched behind traditional authority. He is animated by a strong and dominating motive—the motive of fear: a fear which, as we shall see in a moment, is by no means altogether unworthy or unjustified. It expresses itself in different forms in different parts of the world. In the Roman Church it has been shown in the papal action directed against Abbé Loisy and Father Tyrrell and their confrères. In Anglicanism it is one of the main motives of the Anglo-Catholic movement. The anti-evolutionists of Tennessee and some, at least, of the Anglo-Catholics are intellectual brethren, however strenuously they might deny kinship: for both are entrenching themselves in advanced positions against the oncoming of science and critical enquiry—a very imaginary enemy, for science never had nor can have anything to do with religion, and critical enquiry, provided it is reverent and spiritual, is an unwavering ally. But, timorous for the ark of God, certain types of mind seem to need an external authority:

and so one type set up, as a breastwork, an infallible Church, and another an infallible Book.

It is with the latter that we are concerned, in the circles in which we move. Christianity needs for its defence, the Fundamentalists say, the universal authority of the Bible. That idea, it is to be observed, involves two subsidiary conceptions—(1) that the Bible is equally authoritative in any department of human knowledge with which it deals, and (2) that it is equally valuable for truth in all its parts. Neither of these positions can be assented to, because the former neglects the fact that it was through human history that God slowly unveiled Himself and that inspiration is not dictation, but the touch of God's Spirit upon human minds, who think normally, using the thought-forms of their own time; and because the latter is derogatory to the supreme position, in the Bible itself, of Jesus Christ, who in the Sermon on the Mount opposed His own authority to the vindictiveness of the ancient law. "Ye have heard that it hath been said . . . but I say unto you."

It would be easy to give many illustrations

of the fact that the Bible develops in human knowledge and is not of equal "value" in all its parts. But one will suffice, taken from the supremely important department of ethics. Read again the closing verses of Psalm 137 or Psalm 109: and then begin at the seventh verse of the fourth chapter of the first Epistle of St. John and mark the difference. The two former teach the importance and the duty of hate—unbridled, savage, implacable hate, uttering its malisons on the innocent children of our enemies. Take them, smash them, brain them against the nearest stone and blessed art thou, cries the writer of Psalm 137. And in Psalm 109, the spirit of vengeance stands forth naked and unashamed. As for my enemy, let his wife be a widow and his children fatherless and beggars for bread: and ghastly phrase —may his very prayer come before God as sin! No unrelenting curse could be blacker or more devastating. And then we turn to John—"Beloved, let us love one another. He that loveth not, knoweth not God." It is a sudden leap from darkness to light: and He who has brought us from the one to the other, is He who showed in His own life the loveli-

ness of love, when He cried, "Father, forgive them!"; who, while we were yet sinners, died for us. Our friends, who stand for the equal authority of all parts of the Scripture library, must surely have forgotten how, thereby, they are belittling the wonderful difference that Jesus has made: how, in their very anxiety to defend Him, they are attacking His moral Lordship.

If this, then, be the ground of debate, the battle is over before it is begun. There is development in the long Scripture story, even in our knowledge of what a man should think and be to please God. If the Fundamentalist stands on the equal authority of all parts of Scripture, he stands against the truth as declared by Scripture itself and by his own conscience. From the dim beginnings of awareness of God, seen in half-lights by childish eyes, we come to His full unveiling, when His glory shone in the face of Jesus Christ. If there is development here, in this supreme region, the discovery that there is also development in scientific knowledge is of very small concern. The truth is that the Bible leads up to the moral and spiritual authority of Jesus,

which needs no defence except itself; and the sane Modernist stands by the plain facts of the Bible's development, because he knows that they do nothing but throw into more splendid relief the supremacy of the Bible's Lord.

But that contrast, stated alone, is hardly fair to the Fundamentalist's position: for he would maintain, and truly maintain, that his one anxiety is to secure his Lord's rightful position in the thoughts of men. He is afraid that any apparent lessening of Biblical authority will end in easy thoughts of God and in the loss of the whole redemptive scheme of Christianity. For him, traditional views of the Bible are so inwrought with the Incarnation and the Atonement, that to depart from them will bring the whole structure down in ruins. And the redemptive power of Christ is known by him to be true for the best of all reasons; he has tasted and seen how gracious the Lord is. He is aware directly of a transcendant, holy and separate God: he has felt, scorching him, the fiery flame of his own guilt and sin: alone, in the darkness, he has cried out for the living God to come and save him—and then, splen-

didly, there has drawn nigh to him the tender, majestic figure of the Saviour, and in the astonishment of His mercy and His love, he has found a strange, new hope and a peace which the world cannot give nor take away. And he knows it is true after the manner of the man of old time, who declared, "Whereas I was blind, now I see." This he will not give up while he has any being: and if he feels that the Modernist is attacking that dear knowledge or making it harder for others to sit where he sits, what wonder that he is up in arms? And Modernists have only themselves to thank that he does so think. In a following chapter, we shall concern ourselves with some of the careless, light-minded folly that stains some Modernist utterances. For the moment, let us be content with saying that if criticism really endangered the truth of the redemption of the world, let us consider it once and yet again: and if, finally, we must accept conclusions that take away our Redeemer, let us do so with the despair of men who know that hope is dead and that, the light quenched, it is homeless night without.

Oh! but it is not true. Let not the timorous

be afraid. Search for truth will not damage the Truth. It is plain fact that of the men I have known who were living most securely in the faith of the Saviour, and who preached Him with the chiefest power, every one acknowledged the duty of scientific inquiry into the Scriptures and accepted its conclusions. A whole page could be covered with their names. Let me mention just one. Of all evangelical ministries in Scotland in recent times, that of Dr. Whyte, "the last of the Puritans," stands first. It was a heart-searching message they heard, week by week in Edinburgh: and one note sounded all through it—the note of man's desperate need of a Saviour and his need's satisfaction in Jesus Christ. And yet Dr. Whyte was a "Modernist." He defended Robertson Smith, a most challenging Higher Critic, when this same quarrel was forward in Scotland. "I will cast no stone at him," cried he, "no, nor will I hold the clothes of those who do." His manse became a kind of committee-room for the defence of the arraigned professor; and in the Assembly he spoke passionately in his favor. Let us listen to just one quotation: "Fathers and brethren,

the world of mind does not stand still. And the theological mind will stand still at its peril . . . I find no disparity, no difficulty in carrying much of the best of our past with me in going out to meet and hail the new theological methods. Of all bodies of men on the earth, the Church of Christ should be the most . . . courageous." We need not be afraid of being removed from the fundamentals if we stand beside that old preacher. God grant that his temper may pervade all our Church.

MODERNISM: WHAT IS IT?

THE attitude of mind which is known as "Modernism"—a misleading title, for it is anything but modern—believes that it takes as its motto the Apostle's advice to the Thessalonians: "Prove all things, hold fast that which is good." The Fundamentalists would doubtless say that the Modernists neglect the second part of the injunction, but the "Modernism" that counts is alive to both pieces of advice, and maintains that the second is contingent upon the first. You cannot, they would say, know what the good is which you are to hold fast, until you have honestly examined it: and that, therefore, before you can possess the true fundamentals, you must bring all things, including your religious authority itself, before the bar of reason. The Modernist, therefore, claims to be actuated by a love of truth, in its austere sense; and, if he can justify that claim, he at once ends the dispute in his favour. But implicit in his attitude there

lurk both a source of intellectual error and a spiritual danger: for he seems to indicate that truth can be reached by intellectual, or ratiocinative, processes alone, and thereby exposes himself to the assaults of that "pride of intellect" whose ravages have been so sombrely portrayed for us by Dante.

Before, however, we examine these positions, a short digression into history will do no harm. Can nobody stop the use of these absurd terms, Fundamentalism and Modernism? They do not represent the two sides in this dispute in the very least: for the Fundamentalists are contending for things that are not fundamental and the Modernists are not modern. This use of labels is one of the most effective ways of chloroforming the mind. They are only quick ways of settling a dispute without the trouble of thinking. And, in any case, they are most unseemly on Protestant lips: for the term "Modernist" is an invention of the Roman Church for describing the efforts of some of her own most distinguished sons to escape from the shackles of Roman scholastic theology. Towards the close of last century a movement arose within that Church to do

three things—(1) to develop new philosophic and apologetic methods as distinguished from the methods derived from Aquinas, (2) to permit a candid study of the structure and meaning of the Scriptures, and (3) to make suitable to modern industrial conditions the traditional Roman attitude to the structure of society and the social question generally. There were noble names in that movement, such as those of Loisy and Tyrrell, but against their struggles for freedom the coercive might of the Roman authority acted as decisively as it usually does, and excommunication and the placing of their books on the *Index Expurgatorius* ended their efforts at a new reformation from within. And what in the world is Protestantism doing to borrow their nomenclature? The Fundamentalists are in queer society, when they endeavour to stay the march of the human mind towards truth by the use of an epithet, and to a certain extent even of the methods, learned from the Vatican. We may wonder what Luther would think of them —Luther, the supreme challenger of authority and tradition, who would not accept even the New Testament as he found it, but turned

away contemptuously from the Epistle of James. The reason for the use of the term is plain enough: it wounds by implying a sneer; as if the attitude of mind which insists on examining authority were a mushroom growth of yesterday, whereas it is as old as human reason. We find it in full vigour in the book of Job, when, after the dreary traditionalist and zealot had done their worst to comfort, that impatient young thinker, Elihu —modernist among the modernists—rushed in to talk impertinently indeed, but a good deal more effectively than the "miserable comforters" who had preceded him. Discoveries may be modern: but the attitude of mind, which insists on the right to make them, is as ancient as the use of our reasoning faculties for the purposes for which God gave them. If ever we use the name "Modernist," let us understand that we do so under protest. What we mean by it is the belief that, in its own region, reason stands supreme: that external authority for religion is subject to the examination of reason: and that accepted beliefs must go, if they are clearly incompatible with what is

otherwise known to be true. And these positions, surely, appeal to all right-thinking men.

The controversy, however, is by no means ended with that admission. For the Modernist is exposed to very real dangers, which unless guarded against, will lead him to error and spiritual confusion: and it is an appreciation of that fact that gives reality and depth to Fundamentalist anxiety. "Pride of Intellect" is the mother-sin, so some preceptors tell us: "by that sin fell the angels"; and if a man is to claim supremacy for reason in its own sphere, he must be very clear as to what its limits are. Two extensions, in particular, have to be avoided—(1) that intellect is self-sufficient for the discovery of truth, and (2) that intellect is self-sufficient for life: whereas, alas! a man does not live by mind alone: "it hath not pleased the Lord to save His people by dialectic."

As regards the former it is enough to say that the mind, before it begins to think, *assumes* truth. It has its own axioms which it does not bring before its own bar. It cannot work at all without assumptions. It needs its "laws of thought"—such as, that a thing

cannot both be and not be in the same respect at the same time. Moreover, the reason tends to work by analysis: and some of the ideas which are most important for life are impossible to analyze; as, for instance, love. Before its mystery, the intellect stands defeated, "dark with excess of light." Immediately we are faced with the fact that we cannot develop knowledge unless we are prepared to accept—provisionally, if you will, but nevertheless accept—the dicta of intuition and authority in the regions where reason is inadequate.

As regards the latter, it is enough to say that we have to live while we are enquiring and making up our minds. The devil does not grant us an armistice until we have formulated our doctrine of God, or settled the date of St. John's Gospel. While the scholar is sitting at his desk, the forces of evil are loose in his heart: and unless he can call on God then and at once, things are likely to go hard with him: for he is a child of wrath even as others. And it is here that the Fundamentalist makes his challenge. "I, at least," says he, "am concerned with the things that make for life. I may be stupid and ignorant: but I know that

I need a Saviour now. I cannot wait till all these questions are settled. I cannot endure the thought that you may be taking my Lord away from me and from my fellows. Prove to me that you put first things first: and that you, too, are concerned for the things that belong unto salvation." It is a challenge which the Modernist must take up gravely and manifestly, or stand condemned. If the mass of men disconnect the Modernist with vital religion, then, with an unerring instinct for value, they will turn elsewhere to find a draught of living water.

Therefore, certain characteristics may reasonably be demanded of the Modernist.

He must obviously be humble. The smart epigrammatist—the clever who is "so rude to the good"—is a real public nuisance when he is dealing with religion. After all, "the dear Lord's best interpreters are *humble* human hearts." Indeed, the conceited intellectual juggler is not at heart a lover of truth at all, for no one has looked into the austere face of the real without gaining humility. "A child," cries Newton of himself, "picking up pebbles on the shore of truth." "Light, more light,"

whispers Goethe with his dying breath. Only by humility can men range themselves in the company of the shining ones who seek truth.

Moreover, he ought to develop in himself an instinctive conservatism, and only be willing to give up a traditional belief when he must. After all, the new is not necessarily the true: in fact, the chances are that it is not. "What friends thou hast and their adoption tried, grapple them to thy soul with loops of steel" is a good piece of advice in respect of ideas as well as of men. The critics who have done most to commend those ideas of the structure of Scripture, which have been so serviceable in making faith possible in view of modern science, were naturally conservatively-minded men. Slowness to accept a new idea until it has been properly examined and tested is mark of mental gravity: and unwillingness to part with beliefs cherished by our fathers is a sign of mental good manners. Such men, when they are compelled by facts to accept a new theory, have far more influence in advancing truth than the intellectual fly-by-nights, who chase after every latest guess as if it were

inspired, believing, apparently, that truth not only is born, but dies every day.

Further, the Modernist must always think and speak reverently of those forms of expression which have conveyed vital religious ideas in the past. Mental habits rapidly change and the garments with which thoughts were clothed in a former generation seem outlandish to the people of to-day: but if the thoughts were noble, the language which was allied to them is ennobled also. Take the strongest of all instances: take the instance which an older generation placed upon the Blood:

> There is a fountain filled with blood
> Drawn from Immanuel's veins,
> And sinners plunged beneath that flood
> Lose all their guilty stains.

Not often, in modern churches, do we hear the familiar lines: and, indeed, the imagery sounds crude and material to some ears. There is a physical literalness in it which is not native to many minds. But I wonder if a youth who, with a contemptuous smile, makes sport of it, realizes the sheer pain he is giving to people who have used these phrases to express

the undying reality that lies behind them. For these lines, and that conception, have set forth to men the self-giving Love of God in all its active passion to redeem. They have reminded the heavy-hearted of the source of all peace and hope—the Love that is known in the wounded heart of Christ. They have been associated with that final spiritual loveliness and majesty which is the Cross set in the heart of God for ever: and they are, therefore, themselves set apart. If a Modernist is to commend the Gospel, he must be sensitive to associations so great and so noble.

And, finally, the Modernist must be religious and concerned for religion. For, after all, it is only the man who is himself seeking God, who has the necessary *data* for estimating religious truth. It is the underlying suspicion that Modernists are not evangelically in earnest that is at the root of much of our trouble: and for that suspicion some Modernists have only themselves to thank. I have known some conspicuously alert men intellectually, well-versed in critical problems, to whom I would never think of going if I were in trouble, for I gravely misdoubt whether they

either know or care much about the cure. Not that that is generally, or even widely, true. The most earnest evangelic forces I have known have all, without exception, accepted the modern point of view. But if a man attacks tradition, it is all the more necessary that he should make it quite clear that it is in the name of religion that he does so: and that his chief concern, for himself as for others, is to be able to say from experience "whereas I was blind, now I see."

HIGHER CRITICISM

IT is high time that we all unanimously said boo! to the bogey, which some folk have created, called "higher criticism." For, as it is imagined by those who are afraid of it, it is as real as a scarecrow. To hear some people speak you would imagine that it was a dark rite practised only by atheists: whereas, in plain fact, it is the best friend of those who are anxious to accept the true authority of the Bible.

Now, what is this thing that so alarms kindly minds? The answer is very simple: it is the study of the Bible to discover the age and authorship of its component books. The word "criticism" is singularly unfortunate in English, for it seems to suggest study with a view to disparagement. As a matter of fact, it is the English equivalent of a Greek word which means discrimination or judgment and may equally suggest study with a view to displaying excellence. Biblical scholarship is in that

sense "critical." When it is a study of the words of themselves, in order to discover what the authors actually wrote, it is "lower or textual criticism." "Higher criticism," on the other hand, attempts to find out who wrote the words and when—a truly admirable and useful object of enquiry.

But, it may be asked, why worry? Why not simply accept the traditional views of authorship and age, and save the brains and time of scholars for something practical? The answer is plain: the traditional views of date and authorship render the Bible unintelligible, and in defence of the credibility of the Bible, our scholars in our colleges must get busy.

The existence and nature of the problems which higher criticism sets out to solve are doubtless familiar to all Biblical students. For instance, the traditional view of the authorship of the first five books of the Old Testament is that they were written by Moses. But in Deut. 34 we find an account of Moses' death and burial, and an estimate of the great prophet's character and personality, which is not only clearly written from the viewpoint of a much later time, but singularly vainglori-

ous if written by the prophet himself. Did Moses really write his own obituary notice: and had he such an immodest opinion of himself? The Bible becomes magical and Moses a truly unpleasant person, if he did. Moreover, there are many double accounts, often different in important details, of the same event. It was a perception of the double account of the creation in the first two chapters of Genesis that led to the beginning of modern higher criticism in 1680. The best instance of all, perhaps, is the triple account of the slaying of Goliath. In 1 Samuel 17 we read that David killed him: in 2 Samuel 21: 19 we read that Elhanan killed him: in 1 Chronicles 20:5 we read that Elhanan killed the brother of Goliath. (In the authorized version, it is true that in 2 Samuel 21: 19 we read that Elhanan killed the brother of Goliath, but the words "the brother of" are in italics, to show that they do not occur in the Hebrew: and the revisers, very properly and honestly have omitted them.) Now, you will not deny that that creates a problem: and it is a blessing that we have the higher critics to explain to us the differing

sources from which the Scripture historians drew their divergent accounts.

Still further, events separated by long stretches of time are spoken of as present facts in the same book, as for instance in the Book of Isaiah. Again, it is a blessing that higher critics have saved us from the incomprehensible by showing us that the writings of at least two great men of God are incorporated in the book of Isaiah, and have thereby added another to the noble galaxy of inspired writers. And, finally, language-forms occur in books supposed traditionally to be written before these language-forms existed. The problem thus created is quite intolerable apart from the relief which the higher critics give. To take a crude illustration from our modern speech, supposing some one said that he had discovered a poem by Shakespeare, beginning with the lines:

> "E'en as a Ford goes on its glorious way,
> But stalls completely in the village street."

Would you admit the Shakespearian authorship? Why, you would say that North America itself was a dim kind of thing in the poet's

time: and that certainly Detroit had not swum into his ken, neither did he talk of "stalling" in that sense. And if your informant had given you a choice between acceptance of his view of the authorship and excommunication, either your mind or your soul would have been hurt. Similar, if not quite so vivid, problems exist in Scripture when traditional views on authorship are insisted on: and once again we may bless the higher critics for showing us a more excellent way.

But, it may be said, these solutions of the problems destroy the inspiration of the Bible. If by inspiration we mean mechanical dictation, the charge is true: and a good thing, too, for, whatever the Bible is, it is neither mechanical nor dictated. But if by inspiration we mean that its writers were used and guided by God to record for us His own slow unfolding of Himself, the charge is as far from truth as well may be imagined. We must remember that no Scriptural historical writer claims inspiration for his *material:* it is in its selection, arrangement and use that he is inspired. Canon Driver's admirable words should be pondered: "Criticism in the hands

of Christian scholars does not banish or destroy the inspiration of the Old Testament. It presupposes it. It seeks only to determine the conditions under which it operates, and the literary forms through which it manifests itself." After all, however, this is a comparatively small matter, for the "discriminating" view of the Old Testament is supported by the New Testament, and in the New Testament by the supreme authority of all, Jesus Christ. For He "discriminated" concerning the law: and of all parts of the Old Testament the law might have been regarded as sacrosanct. Read again the second half of Matthew 25: note the sharp divergence of the recurring "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time . . . but I say unto you," and deny, if you can, that conclusions as to the varying authority of Scripture have His sanction. Nor are the apostles more bound than He to a rigid theory of verbal dictation. They sometimes quote from the Hebrew; sometimes from the Greek version of the Hebrew, when the latter varies from the former; and sometimes they misquote. No higher critic is more free in practice from verbal in-

spiration than they are. And, indeed, that venerably erroneous view as to the structure of Scripture cannot live for a moment when we remember the problems which lower or textual criticism has to solve. For the text of considerable passages, *e.g.*, in the Psalms or in Hosea, is in confusion in our manuscripts. Our lovely and loved English translation is due, in part, to wonderful guesses at the original intention of the writer. Nor is it a matter for astonishment that mistakes have been made in copying the ancient books. Hebrew is a difficult language to read with good eyes in a good light; and it is a worse to write. The old copyists must often have been aging men, working with dim illumination, when their eyes were beginning to fade in a world which had not yet produced spectacles. They were bound to make copying errors; and so they did, until in some passages the original, as written, does not make sense. It is incredible that the mechanical theory of inspiration should have held the field as long as it has, in face of such plain facts. It is pitiable that it should be showing its burdensome features again at this time of day. There is no ques-

tion that it was the direct cause of the departure of many of our best young minds from religious faith altogether. Sir G. A. Smith, in his *Old Testament and Preaching* (p. 27), has a passage which we should read and consider. He tells how, when he was going through the correspondence of Henry Drummond, he came upon countless letters from young men, who were being driven from faith because they could not accept the view of the Bible, which the Fundamentalists are trying to force on us again, and who were writing to Drummond to find some easement. Principal Smith describes the position as a "tragedy," that men longing for Christ should be driven from Him because their minds refused assent to a view of Scripture which was untrue. I can add a little footnote to that passage. For a period I was responsible in Edinburgh for the work Drummond inaugurated among the students. Hundreds of questions were sent to me about religious difficulties, but never one (that I remember) about the verbal inspiration of the Bible. Young Scotland accepted the Word of God, without the fetters. Not a single student was driven from Christianity

by Old Testament discrepancies: and the Bible was a more compelling authority than ever, because they all knew that its authority was spiritual. And who had made that wonderful difference? Who had made faith possible for Scottish youth? None but the wise, patient, Christ-loving higher critics of our Church. Let us thank God for them.

Where, then, do we stand? What is it that this reverent study of the Word has given us? Four gifts, at least.

It has given us a Bible in which we see an unveiling of God in the development and history of a chosen people. We mark in it a majestic movement from the tribal deity up to the God of the New Covenant. And He stands out all the clearer, because of the human history through which He is known.

It has given us a Bible, in which we get the record of the vision of God directly perceived by chosen souls—souls who could say "but we musicians know." And we mark in it how these direct perceptions supplement one another, until mercy and truth kiss one another in God.

It has given us a Bible, in which His right

glory and supremacy are given to Him who is the express image of the Father, even Jesus Christ. He has become Lord of the Book. And it has given us a Bible which shuts up the soul alone with God. Not with politics: not with science: but with God.

Perhaps you will permit me one other word. There is one soul that is always unconsciously a critic, in the noble sense—and that is the devout soul. A Bible lies on my desk, which once lay near the hand of one very dear to me. If you close it and look at the edge of its pages, you will find that three parts of it are frayed from constant use—the Psalms, John's Gospel and 1 Corinthians. One page is loose—the page on which Corinthians 1:13 is printed. Ah! there is bound to be "discrimination," when people are in earnest, and come to the Bible to find God. In that spirit come to this great library, and He will not fail to meet you in His Word.

THE BIBLE AS AUTHORITY

NO one can impartially read the Bible and fail to notice the accent of authority which rings through it. It seems all the time to be demanding not only the attention, but the allegiance, of its readers. It states rather than argues: proclaims rather than persuades. And the Church, very much alive to this spiritual regality, has acknowledged the authoritative position in faith and practice of this supreme library. But the authority of books is inwrought with their truth: and this at once raises a question for some minds. "If you accept the conclusions of the Higher Critics," they ask, "how can you hold to the belief that the Bible is true? For the critics hold that, in some of its historical statements, the Bible disagrees with itself, and, in others, disagrees with that which has otherwise been discovered to be true. And if any one Scriptural statement is proved erroneous, confidence in all the rest is shaken."

Involved in this, of course, is a conception of the mechanical unity of Scripture. It is true that, in a machine, the collapse even of an insignificant part of it throws the whole machine out of use. In an automobile there is, for instance, a mysterious something known as a commutator: if it goes wrong (as some of us by painful experience know), the wheels will shortly stop going round. The little rift within the lute likewise, as the poet very justly observes, makes all the music mute. But of course, the Bible is not a machine: it is a national literature, extending over hundreds, or possibly thousands, of years. And some of us find it difficult to understand how the accuracy of a quotation from an ancient collection of hero-songs, about the sun standing still on Ajalon, affects the perception of a man who lived centuries later, and in the bright vision of his own heart saw the God of the New Covenant. A scientific mistake in Chaucer does not make Browning less of a teacher in the strange ways of human nature. The fact is that, until we get rid, once and for all, of any mechanical conceptions of Scripture, we are not going to get on much farther. If

ever a collection of books was living and growing, that collection is the Bible.

Moreover, when we enquire into the "truth" of the Bible (or anything else), we are using one of the two or three terms which it is at once most necessary and most difficult to define. A statement, a fantasy, a drama, a picture, a promise and a man can all be "true"—and the adjective means something different in each connection. The logicians used to advise us to have special regard to the "universe of discourse" in which, at any time, we might be mentally moving: for a statement may be true in one universe of discourse and false in another. For instance, we all know Stevenson's grim allegory, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. If any one asks us if we regard it as true, we must answer (if we would be accurate), Yes and No. In the universe of discourse of pure history it has no relation to truth whatever. No eminent doctor was ever able to alter completely his body: no drug ever existed, which could turn a man of five feet six inches into one of six feet two inches, or could tip-tilt a Roman nose. It is all pure nonsense from the point of view of history. But in the universe

of discourse of things spiritual, it is horrible, ghastly truth. We all know our own Edward Hyde, that leering, snaky indweller of our own souls, who will leap out and become the thing we are, unless continually we lay hold on the cleansing power of God. Similarly, what is the use of asking if the Bible is "true"? It all depends on the mental sphere to which we happen to be moving. We get all sorts of truth in the Bible: and if we insist on turning them all into one sort we are asking for trouble. The main point is that, in sundry manners, there is contained in it all that is necessary to guide us in the path that leads to God, who is our Home.

The main difficulties, however, seem to arise when the Bible is, apparently, giving us plain, historic truth. A great deal of the records consists in the accounts of the development of the Hebrew people: and therein there would appear to be no movement in any universe of discourse except that of ordinary history. But the critics discover statements that clash with present knowledge. How, then, can the Bible be regarded as historically true? In answer to that, we point to the fact that history tells

us not only what happened in the past, but what men thought in the past: and that it is more important to know the latter than the former, for thereby we perceive how mental progress comes to be. Now, the Bible, if it is to tell us what men thought in the past, *must* contain error. Only that history which sets forth the mistaken ideas of the past is true history: and if the Bible contained nothing that was contradictory to our knowledge of to-day it would be false history. The fact that the Bible sets forth such ideas as true only indicates that it is writing from the point of view of that time. The men of that day believed these things: and the fact that they believed wrongly does not alter the fact that the Bible, in conveying their errors, is conveying historic truth.

Now it is important to get this simple idea clear. There is progress of every sort in the Bible, because there is, thank God, progress in humanity. The early, dim ideas are recorded for us in order that we may see how the Divine Educator of men slowly and with infinite patience drew us from ignorance to knowledge, from darkness to light. If there

were no error in the ideas of the men of long ago—errors about the world and its structure and its begetting, about society, about duty, about God—there would be no need for God to discipline men and chastise them and exile them. Indeed, it is only when we perceive how mistaken men were long ago in their ideas that we begin to get a philosophy of history that has God in the heart of it. The long pain of the Hebrew people is explained to us when we realize out of what foolish thoughts of God they had to be drawn, before they knew the God that is: and it does not affect the truth of the Bible in the least that these foolish thoughts are recorded for us precisely as they appeared to the men who thought them —rather the reverse in fact, for it makes the record more living and more convincing.

Let us take a concrete example. We all know the story of the frustrated sacrifice of Isaac by his father. As the records give it to us, God commanded Abraham to slay his son —which is precisely what Abraham thought He did. We know perfectly well, thanks to Jesus, that God, our Heavenly Father, never wanted human sacrifice. To our knowledge

of to-day, since the Light of the world has shined, such an idea would be an affront. Any man who proposed to take his own boy and smash the life out of him to please God, would be shut up at once in an asylum for the insane. And we know, too, that God does not change: He is the same yesterday, to-day and forever: the slaughter of innocents never gained His tender favour. Nor did the righteous God ever tempt men to sin. But—and this is the point—men actually did think, at one time, that the only way to please Him was to immolate some fair human offering on His grim altar. They believed the voice of God called them so to do: and if the Bible had not indicated that they did so it would have been a false record. So it, accurately, and honestly, puts down the statement, so commanding in men's minds and conscience of long ago, that God ordered this thing. The Bible truly records these monstrously untrue thoughts—and so, ultimately, made more glorious the Person who, for good and all, sent the horrid brood of them shuddering back into the darkness whence they sprang. And, at the same time, the Bible in this story records

the upward leap of the human conscience, when in place of a man it substitutes a ram: but there was a long way to go before humanity was to reach the place of the true knowledge of God's desires—a way marked by discipline and pain, and failure,—until at last men know that the sacrifices of God are a broken and a contrite heart. Thus, go to the Bible to find what men thought; and often you will find what they thought wrongly. But also you will find how God taught them and trained them to think right: you will find the great, continual, educational ministry of God set in relief: until at last they see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Further, while the Bible conveys much of its message through history, it is a *spiritual* message which it is concerned to convey: and it conveys it in different ways, suited to different times. Very often it is the spiritual parallel, underlying apparent history, that we are to seek: and sometimes the history is only apparent—in reality it is allegory.

We may occasionally permit ourselves to regret that the interpretation of the Bible, and the guardianship of Christianity, have been

so much left to that queer, competent, but decidedly limited mongrel, the Anglo-Saxon. Christianity and the book which enshrines its growth and teaching have mysticism at their heart: and the Anglo-Saxon is the last person on earth to understand some aspects of a religion or a book like that. For he calls a spade a spade: and instinctively becomes suspicious in the presence of thoughts that transcend speech—particularly his speech: and he is not given to admitting that other methods of expression than his own are reasonable. Decent, honest, downright, unimaginative soul—what a mess he has made of the Book of Jonah: how successfully he has "turned God's poetry into prose." Now, each Biblical writer, on the other hand, moved naturally in the region of image and of allegory. He expressed his deepest aspirations in pictures: he gave us the Beloved Community in a four-square city, shaped like a cube. And if we are to get at the truth of his writings we must continually be reaching back, through the thing said, to the thing signified. When we do, we frequently find that the apparently historical merges into the permanently spiritual, and

discover in that latter region the unassailable truth which the Bible is conveying. A man who has read Jonah, without seeing its universal spiritual significance, has not begun to understand what that great book is. And in the New Testament some puzzling incidents need to be "spiritualized" to be understood. Take, for instance, the story of the miraculous draught in John, when the fishers took on board their craft "one hundred and fifty and three" fish from the sea after Christ came nigh them. In old days, as those strange amalgams of natural history and piety, the Bestiaries, tell us, men believed that there were one hundred and fifty-three kinds of fish in the sea. One of every sort was taken, once the Lord came nigh. And that at once hints the spiritual significance of the incident. The ship is the Church and the sea is the world. For long the Church labors fruitlessly, for the power of the presence of the Lord is lacking. And then He comes, in His risen power, and representatives of every nation and people are swung into His keeping and into the fellowship of His Church. Who first (as far as I know) preached on that incident in that way? Why,

Augustine—that great defender of the faith: and until men, like him, will seek for the spiritual reality that is thus permanently taught us, they have no business to be calling the Bible either true or untrue: for they have not discerned its purpose.

And then, finally, within the Bible there is, plain as a pikestaff, that which is true for each man as he reads it. He *knows* it is true: for the spirit within him responds to it. The Indwelling Divine answers to the Word of God. And it will not do—it simply will not do—for us to hesitate or doubt about the authority of that which we know to be true, because elsewhere in so extensive a library there are statements which we hesitate to accept, or which are made in a manner foreign to our minds. The clear, unexpugnable demands and teachings of Jesus shine out in their authority, entirely untouched by the guesses at truth of men who only dimly foresaw His day. If we allow the floating axe or the Gadarene swine to blur for us the teachings of our Lord, we are simply not in earnest. We are not listening to the voice that speaks within. For here no qualifications, no explanations about universes of

discourse, are necessary. In a language apprehended alike of Anglo-Saxon and of Hebrew, of Barbarian, Scythian, bond and free, the Lord tells us what we must do and what the God of the Redeeming Love has done, is doing and will do for ever. And because the Bible leads up to and enshrines Him, so long as men call Him Lord, no man need trouble about its authority.

THE BIBLE AS THE WRITTEN CHRIST

THE Bible, like the Christian religion, has Christ in the centre. The Old Testament points to Him—unconsciously, it may be, but nevertheless points to Him. The Epistles meditate upon Him and unfold His consequences. The Gospels tell the story of His life. The significance of the Bible would fade, with Him away; for all its treasures are gathered into one, even in Him. It is largely to emphasize that so obvious, so illuminative and so Christian fact that this book is written.

It is not necessary to develop the statement that He is the centre of our faith, and that no man cometh to the Father but by Him. Christianity is best defined in the words of Bishop Gore, as "faith in a certain Person, Jesus Christ." In our theology, as in our religion, it is a case of Jesus in the midst, or both our theology and our religion—two different things by the way—will automatically cease

to be Christian. But we are not always so alive to the fact that Christ is in the centre of the history which the Biblical records relate. The two elect societies culminate and proceed, respectively, from Him. In Him the chosen people fulfil their destiny: from Him the Church of God takes its spring. It is hardly possible to imagine a more vivid and dramatic consummation of a national purpose than that which the Hebrew people afford when, after their amazing preservation and development, their achievements in prosperity and in disaster, they are blown by the winds of heaven and scattered to the ends of the earth at the coming of Christ. We read of them appearing out of nowhere—nomads amongst the peoples of the world; drinking the bitter waters of slavery and yet preserving their national quality; led by their wars of destiny through inconceivable dangers, until at last they dwell secure in their promised land: preserved there, although it contained the plain of Esdraelon, that cockpit of the ancient world —that Belgium of the East; giving birth to the greatest sequence of religious geniuses the world has ever known, in their prophets; re-

taining their noble endowments amidst the bitterness of exile, until they could flower again in the happy days of restoration; guarded as no people has been guarded, though menaced on either side by the jealousy of mighty empires: till the Babe of Bethlehem grown into a man, died on Calvary—and then, their purpose achieved, they disappear amongst the races of the earth, like a river that has at last found its sea. In their place, a new people arise, drawn from every tongue and kindred and nation, when the Church of Christ begins to spread in the world. And in the midst, between the chosen nation and the chosen society out of every nation, stands the lone, majestic figure of Jesus Christ.

Herein we discern the supreme value and vital importance of the Bible. It is the written Christ: it contains the only record of His life: it is the only source to which we can go to learn of the historical Jesus. Other historical references are slight and meagre: for our knowledge of the "years lived out beneath the Syrian blue" we are dependent on the Scriptures: and therefore, it is not possible to exaggerate their importance. But, if we put Him in the

central place, the varying value of the records becomes at once apparent. We learn of Him, indeed, in the Old Testament, through the diverse expectations of the Ideal King and the Suffering Servant, which were both so strangely fulfilled in Him. We learn of Him vividly, in the impressions left on the minds of His friends and in what they held to be implicit in Himself and in His teaching. But chiefly we learn of Him in the actual records of His life and sayings—especially in the first three Gospels, and above all, in Mark. It is a small thing to say that these three books form, by far, the most important historical documents in this world. They are of more significance than any other records in the precise degree that Jesus is more significant than any other person who ever lived. Wherefore, let us touch them devoutly, as a man would lay a hesitating, reverent hand upon the garments of the Lord Himself.

Now, the Synoptic Gospels purport to be, in the main, plain historic truth. While they contain teaching in the parabolic form, they make it clear what is parable and what is not. And, even if here and there an allegoric inter-

pretation can be supported (as certainly can be attempted in some passages in John), the manifest intent of Matthew, Mark and Luke is to relate the actual words that issued out of Jesus' lips and the actual occurrences of His life. The fact that both Matthew and Luke were writing with particular objects in view, while it exalts the importance of Mark, who had no concern with Jewish or Gentile propaganda, does not alter the historical method which they both employed. Matthew, doubtless, wanted to win his own race to Christian allegiance; while Luke was anxious to gather the Gentiles within the fold. But this only affects the selection and emphasis of their material. Both were equally in earnest to convey historical facts, in the sense in which we commonly use that term—in fact, Luke specifically says so in regard to his own work, in the opening verses of his first chapter. In these three Gospels, then, we are dealing with putative history, in the ordinary sense of the word; and as history we must judge them.

All of which is a great mercy, for it is of the first importance that the divine Jesus Christ should be a historical fact. There are,

indeed, some who say, and seem to think, otherwise. To them Jesus is a veiled, nebulous figure—a prophet of whom we know very little, who was put to death for His apocalyptic views and from whom the Christ-idea sprang, somehow, out of the aspirations of mankind. There is, of course, a distinction which can be drawn between Jesus and the risen Christ, which it is well always to bear in mind. Fundamentalist literature frequently neglects it. Jesus is the actual, physical being who walked this earth, made in fashion as a man and subject, as Philippians tells us, to the limitations of humanity; while the risen Christ is the glorious object of our worship, eternal in the heart of God. It is the distinction between the *divinity* of Jesus and the *deity* of the risen Christ. But that is a very different thing from holding that the Christ is the personification of a human longing, sprung from the idealization of a vague, prophetic figure, whose history is only legend. If we are to draw any distinction, it must be between the Divine in human form and the Divine beyond human form —a perfectly valid and orthodox distinction, as Origen would have told us. But we cannot

afford to give up the Divine in human form: we cannot get along without the statement that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself: for, if we do, we are retaining a Christianity with the bottom knocked out of it. Carlyle is reported to have said that he could believe in God, "if He would *do* something": and our only answer to that has been to point to Jesus Christ.

But if God was not in Christ, then (as far as we know) God has done nothing. Humanity has done it all: and our Maker is some far-off aloofness, sitting in His chill chambers in the high and lofty place, blind to the tears of earth, deaf to the cries that echo from this "sad sister among the stars." Far better that there be no God: far better that the crown should fall on humanity's repugnant brow—for man at least can love!

In a situation so serious and so momentous, we owe a debt past measurement to the grave students, whom men call critics; for they have authenticated the records for us, and we can be confident that in them we have a living portrait of Jesus. Things had gone pretty far, when modern students (many of them we

may proudly remember, in our own Church) took the matter in hand. For a while there was a craze for putting the dates of the records late: the farther they could push them into the second century the happier a certain type of mind, noticeably those of Teutonic descent, seemed to be. Some, indeed, went farther still, if all tales be true, and hinted that the story of Jesus was an invention of priests, and that Jesus was a myth. Remarkable priests they must have been, to be such scamps and to be able to invent such loveliness: and still more remarkable people, who listened to such nonsense. Archbishop Whately put a satisfactory fool's cap on them by writing a *jeu d'esprit* entitled "Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Bonaparte," in which he made out an excellent case for the legendary character of the Corsican. Napoleon, you would say, was historical enough, and to disprove him would tax the capacities of an archbishop himself: but even he, so near our own time, does not stand out, in any biography I have read, so vividly, so genuinely, so convincingly a person as does Jesus from the pages of the matchless records made

by simple men so long ago. This fact alone would make us inclined to be suspicious of over-radical views: but, when it is backed by the researches of sane scholars, our minds may reasonably be at rest. In a following chapter we shall glance at some of the processes by which the records came into being, reminding ourselves that there must have been "sources" at the command of the evangelists, as, indeed, Luke clearly indicates. Meantime, it is enough to say that the work of the critics has had the effect of dating the Synoptics between sixty A.D. and eighty A.D., and of securing their traditional authorship. That is to say, critical scholarship has been defensive against the ravages of critics: a reverent search for truth has returned to us the historical portrait of Jesus, on which doubts had been cast: so that it becomes a matter for amazement that any one who cares for the historicity of the Founder of our Faith, should throw stones at our professors. The attacks on our colleges, made by some Fundamentalists, are made in sheer ignorance: and the best that we can say of them, speaking the truth in love, is that

their zeal for God is not according to knowledge.

We turn, then, to the records as we turn to any other well authenticated historical accounts: the more we study them, the more the fact already referred to strikes us—that the picture of Jesus in the Gospels is the most living portrait we know. It is so harmonious, and yet so unstudied: so effortlessly proportionate; so natural, though so far beyond nature; that, as we read, we seem to hear His voice and see His tears. That such an effect should be produced by such men and by such means is nothing less than marvellous. If an ordinary writer endeavours to convey to us a personality in whom he is interested, he spends much time and elaboration in description and analysis. Even if he has the genius to let the character unfold itself in its own speech and in incident, he endeavours to paint the lily and adorn the rose by passages written from his own point of view, dissecting the personality and describing its form and feature. But there is nothing of this sort in the Gospels. A truly remarkable fact is that there is not a single line descriptive of the personal

appearance of the Lord. No man knows what Jesus looked like. For such guesses as artists make they are dependent on a thin tradition handed down by artists themselves from early portraits. Some, indeed, hold that the Christ Face in art has behind it some vague resemblance to that one Face, that smiled on little children: but they get no support from the Gospels. Nor is there any passage of that kind of dreary analysis of character, which makes so many biographies at once burdensome and wrong. On the contrary, all that the evangelists do is to relate what Jesus did to a man or said to a woman, with an artlessness which conceals no art and yet is more effective than any art: and out of the record steps a Person vital, arresting, convincing, true. And when we reflect on the capacity of the writers, the wonder grows no less. Luke, it is true, was an educated man, and like other members of his noble profession had a happy eye for the lovely in deed and a quick ear for the delicate in phrase. But there is no reason for thinking him a past-master in literature: and as for the other two, they were very ordinary, uneducated mortals. And yet, they

gave us the Jesus of history, by doing nothing other than recording the history of Jesus. The records live because He was alive, and in them speaks for himself. The marvel of it all becomes more vivid when we compare the reality of His portraiture with the unreality of other attempts to convey historical figures. Quite recently, a very clever man has endeavoured to renew for us the figure of Joan of Arc: and in that attempt Mr. G. B. Shaw deserves all the praise he has won. And yet it is a failure: the Maid of France does not live for us in that voice-hearing tomboy. The only scene that (to my mind) carries conviction is the scene between the French Bishops and the English Earl, when they put their political cards on the table, and, for opposing reasons, decide to murder Joan. But all the gifts of Mr. Shaw cannot capture the unearthly figure of the Maid: easily, she breaks through his language and escapes. How then did those unlettered men of long ago manage to give to the world that other? The records of Jesus are all but as marvellous as Himself: or rather, they are marvellous because they allow Him to be Himself, in word and deed. And for that

they stand alone, demanding men's reverent assent, as to the written Word of God.

We are all agreed that the Lord Jesus is the object of our faith, and that, therefore, the only records we possess of His life and words are of supreme importance. Everything about them is of significance; and, in particular, it is a desirable thing to know a little about the way in which they came into being and about the materials which the evangelists possessed when they set themselves to the arresting task of writing the greatest biography in the world. Knowledge of origin is always interesting and often useful; and, while the explanation of how a thing came to be is not an explanation of the thing itself, a perception of the genesis of such books as the Bible contains frequently lightens our difficulties of interpretation and shows how we may accept its authority as a whole, without being tied down to each and all of its parts. If we can discern various sources and can point out that one source is of a different order from another, we are thereby freed from the necessity of treating it in the same way, or of demanding from it the same "quality" of truth. Just

in the same way as we have been distinguishing between the "universes of discourse" in which different types of writing in the Old Testament are true, so we may, by a knowledge of origins, distinguish between different parts of the New Testament, and find such difficulties as those created by the story of the Gadarene swine, for instance, considerably eased. But apart from that, anything about the Gospels ought to be interesting, just because they are the written Christ. We cannot know too much about anything that is related to Him.

It must have been an amazing experience to walk about the lanes and glens of Galilee with Jesus Christ. In fact, it seems almost incredible that there were many men and women who actually did it. The imagination of Christendom has played so long and, on the whole, so nobly on the thought of Him, that He has come to live for us in a beyond-world, set apart from earth. One of our articles of belief that we hold least vividly is that He was made in fashion as a man. It may be true that, in the circles outside the ranks of Christian belief, the doctrine of His divinity seems incredible; but, within the Church, it

is more true to say that it is His humanity that has become most attenuated. Christian people, perhaps from reverence, have tended to push Him farther and farther away from the common life and experience of men, until they were in danger of creating a "docetic" Christ —a Christ whose body was mere appearance, a ghost-body enshrouding God. That danger is by no means allayed yet. Continually utterances may be heard and writings read which give us a Christ who has no connection with the Jesus of history, and is a reversion to ancient heresies. It is strange how easily, through anxiety for orthodoxy, men may become heterodox. I have myself heard an eloquent fundamentalist earnestly upholding something very like the Apollinarian heresy, and believing that in so doing he was defending the divinity of Christ against modernists. How little he knew that the attempt to unify the Person of Christ at the expense of His human nature had been made in the fourth century, and that one of its chief opponents had been that doughty defender of the faith, St. Athanasius. We can never be sound in doctrine unless we hold to the true humanity of Jesus. The main

problem for theology is to relate that fact to divinity; and it clearly can never succeed in so doing by explaining the humanity away.

So Jesus lived in fashion as a man and dwelt among us. There were those that saw Him plain, that caught the tones of His voice when He talked of an erring son and a kind-hearted Samaritan, that smiled back in answer to His smile, that watched His falling tears. And in the gloaming, many a time, they sat with Him on the edge of the corn-field, while in murmuring cadences and low, He spoke of God and goodness. When we imagine it through the mist of centuries—a mist made golden by His love—it seems an experience too great for mortal men to bear. Of one thing we may be certain, it burned deep into their memories. His personality gripped and engrossed them; His influence dominated and permeated their minds; the loveliness of Himself and of His words possessed them. And then there came the tragic days, when despair settled on the hearts of His friends. How they had loved Him; how they had hoped; how they had trusted! And now all was gone; their dream had fallen "sheer, a blinded thing";

for He who, they had hoped, would have delivered Israel, was crucified, dead and buried. But suddenly "the dawn came up like thunder"; they knew in the hearts of them that their Lord was alive and that all the power and care and love on which they had leaned were there for their sustaining yet.

And what happened? Why this, at least: they talked about Him. They talked about little else. If you could have come upon a little company of His followers in Jerusalem or Antioch, standing at a street corner, the words you would have heard most frequently would have been, "Don't you remember?" Each one would be eager to add to the stock of gracious memory; each one would have something particular and personal to contribute; all would be drinking in the reminiscences of each, and repeating them at night at the supper-table and next day at the market. And thus the knowledge of Him and of His sayings spread and developed, until the time came for some one to suggest that they ought to be put in writing for future generations.

It is sometimes helpful to make contemporary an experience like that. Nothing is un-

His sayings, then the early, fragmentary Gospels to which Luke refers; then Mark, Matthew and Luke, in that order, and finally, later and in a different category, the great, commanding Gospel of St. John.

Now, this rough, impressionist outline of the way in which the Gospels came into being makes them a more wonderful creation than if we regard them as the outcome of some sort of magical, automatic writing. It is the lack of magic that causes the wonder. Working like normal, honest historians, these men, two of whom were unlettered, succeeded in producing this inspired portrait—so inspired that it has turned the world upside down. Far from belittling the Bible, this thought of origin and sources to my mind exalts it. It is when the amazing emerges through the ordinary that it becomes amazing; and, moreover, it is when we can believe that we are reading the normal history of Jesus that we can be confident that we are in touch with the Jesus of history. Once again, we have reason to be grateful to the patient scholars, whom ignorance alone abuses, who have discovered

the simple, human means by which the miracle of the Bible has come to be.

But, it may be, a question will arise in some minds as to how far we can depend on the accuracy of records transmitted at first orally and then, by gradual accumulation, put in writing. Everything depends, first, upon the accuracy of the oral tradition, and second, on the evangelists' power of selection. In regard to the former it is worth while emphasizing the exercise of memory which the peoples of the East have always indulged in, and on which they were, at that time, all but dependent alike for their entertainment and for their dissemination of knowledge, amongst the classes to whom we owe the story of Jesus. Few of them could read or write; but long stories were doubtless told them and repeated by them one to the other, and thus their verbal memories, which of all faculties grows by use, would be strongly retentive. In particular, they would be accurate in reporting sayings, for their minds must have had some of the powers of children. We all know how a child will not permit the slightest alteration in the phraseology of some familiar nursery story, and it

may well be that that gift of the child-like mind has played its part in preserving for us the authentic words of the Friend of little children. At any rate, the correspondence and the consistency of the sayings of Jesus in the synoptics are sufficient alone to secure us in our belief that in them we have a dependable compendium of the teachings on which so much depend.

The second condition—the fact that the evangelists had to select from what may have been a considerable mass of material—possibly helps us when we come to the passages which are inherently difficult of acceptance. It is impossible to think of the passage of such a power as Jesus through the world without imagining that all manner of apocryphal stories would gather round His name. In fact, we know that they did. In the Gospel of the Infancy, for instance, there are records of the boyhood of Jesus, which represent Him as doing purely magical and self-centred things—such as clapping His hands after He had made some clay-pigeons, so that they flew, and even on one occasion, striking dead by a word a boy who had annoyed Him. Amongst an Eastern

people, used to stories of magic and black art, it was inevitable that such anecdotes should attach themselves to a personality so potent, and the marvel is that more of them did not creep into the Gospels. There is a class of "miracles" which are purely thaumaturgic, i.e., they serve no moral or helpful end, but are marvels pure and simple, and we should expect to find many examples of wonder-deeds of that sort attributed to Jesus. As I say, it is amazing that we do not; and if any story of that sort has crept in—such as the story of the swine or the withered fig tree—it only sets forth all the more the spiritual selective power of the evangelists. They must have been truly inspired to have avoided cramming the Gospels from end to end with the apocryphal. And let none be kept back from adherence to the authority of Jesus, because, possibly, we have one or two records of what people only imagined Him to have done.

For in these records we have a harmonious, consistent agreement on the personality of the Lord; on His revelation of God's love for man, active and redeeming, and on His teaching as to what man should be and how he should be it.

And through it all, He Himself moves, dominating and alive, He came; He lived; He died for men. He showed us man at his height, and when we think of God we can think of nothing more worship-worthy than the God in Christ. Take Him away—and let the night envelop us! Ah! but He is there in history, and He is here by our side, and, if we will let Him, in our hearts. Wherefore, pore over that Life and Death; commune with Him anew in the Word; and rest ye in the Lord.

THE BIBLE AS THE RULE OF FAITH AND PRACTICE

ONE of the results of the scholarly study of the Scriptures has been to raise afresh the question of the relation in which they stand to the Church. Is the Bible now the final authority for the Church's doctrine: and, if so, in what sense? The Reformers, of course, had no doubt on the matter. The Westminster Confession is entirely explicit, for, after enumerating the separate books, it says, "all of which are given by inspiration of God to be the rule of faith and life." No other external authority is considered at all: the Roman view of the authority of the Church is excluded: and the Bible is enthroned as the one regulator to which churches are to appeal, for "the infallible rule of the interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself." Inasmuch as the Confession also holds to the verbal inspiration and accuracy of the original text in Hebrew and Greek (cf. Chap. 1, v. 8), and seeing that

scholarship has proved that in many cases the text has become confused in copying, clearly a question of great importance has arisen, and we must, somewhat anxiously, enquire as to the position which the Bible occupies as the authority for the Church's thought to-day.

In answer thereto, we cannot do better than quote the article on Revelation in the doctrinal basis of our United Church. In that document, it may be noted, the article on Scripture stands second, with the article on God standing first; while in the Westminster Confession the order is reversed. The change is nothing but an improvement and right. Man realized the existence of God before the Scriptures were written. Nowhere in the Bible is there an attempt to prove God: the Most High is the great assumption lying behind the Scriptures, and the witness to Him lies deep in the spirit of man. It is, according to the Psalmist, only the fool who says in his heart that there is no God. Consequently, our articles are true to Scripture in putting the doctrine of God before the doctrine of revelation; while the Westminster divines had permitted their hatred of Rome and its authoritative claims to

cloud their judgment, and put the Book before its Lord. It is in little things that we often may best judge progress: and in this little alteration of order of precedence we can, I think, discern a genuine development in right theological thinking.

The article in our basis upon this matter I shall quote in full. It may be of interest beyond our own borders; and it certainly ought to be of interest within them. Is it too much to hope that our membership will make itself familiar with the basal doctrinal statement of our own Church? We ought to know what our Church stands for in the matter of doctrine, which is the unfolding of that which we hold to be implicit in our religious faith. The more our document is studied the more any fears that our Church stands for an ultra-liberal position will be dissipated. It is, as a matter of fact, a thoroughly conservative statement. I remember the surprise displayed once by a prominent Fundamentalist when I quoted to him some of its passages—particularly Article 3, on the Divine purpose—and his expression of satisfaction therewith. The basis as a whole is far more conservative

than a confession of faith drawn up by, say, the late Principal Denney would have been: and if any criticism is to be levelled at it, it is on the ground that it leans overmuch to the past. However, it is our written statement of the implications of our faith, and in the matter of Revelation it is clear and explicit.

"We believe that God has revealed Himself in nature, in history and in the heart of man; that He has been graciously pleased to make clearer revelation of Himself to men of God who spoke as they were moved by His spirit; and that in the fulness of time He has perfectly revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, who is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person. We receive the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, given by inspiration of God, as containing the only infallible rule of faith and life, a faithful record of God's gracious revelations, and as the sure witness to Christ."

To that statement most of us will give hearty assent. Certainly this book is written in accord with its spirit and its letter. For in it is suggested the progressive and

developing revelation of God, and its culmination in Jesus Christ, with the supreme authority given to Him. There are, however, two words in it which need to be specially noted—one of which may occasion dispute, while the other, if taken away from its technical sense, may give rise to mistake. These words are "containing" and "rule." According to us, the Bible *contains* a *rule* of faith and life; and both the emphasized words are important for a proper understanding of our position.

If the Bible is primarily regarded as a rule of faith and life, it is clear at once that the word "containing" must be retained and made emphatic. For a great deal of the Bible has nothing to do with faith and life—or, if there be some connection, it is derivative and remote. For instance, the detailed measurements of the Tabernacle, the genealogical tables in Chronicles, the records of such primitive social arrangements as the compulsory marriage of a deceased brother's wife, or the meticulous instructions for ceremonial washing, have nothing to do with the faith or practice of people living in Canada to-day.

Those parts of the Bible to which we can appeal must be distinguished from those parts to which only Hebrews of long ago could appeal: history must be separated from the statement of that which has no history because it is eternal: records of thoughts and practices, which have passed away, must be set apart from perceptions of the divine will which are for all time, in order that we may discover the authoritative rule for us, and, the moment these facts are perceived, the word "containing" becomes inevitable. It is a blessing that at last it is firmly set in the doctrinal statement of our Church, and that we are escaped from a view of Scripture which seemed to put tables of measurement and the Sermon on the Mount on the same level.

The second emphasized word, *"rule"* of faith and life, is a technical theological term and must always be understood in its technical sense. It comes from a Latin word which originally signified a piece of straight stick or a ruler, and that, in turn, is connected with a verb meaning "to guide." A rule is a "regulator." It is not a set of rules, or of by-laws, or of regulations, such as those by which traf-

fic is controlled in New York, or decent behavior is secured in public parks in Toronto. It is an external authority to which appeal can be made in difficulty or doubt or darkness. It is as the Psalmist says, a "lamp unto our feet": it shows the path immediately before us, and then tells us to adventure out into the rocky darkness and so find our way home. And, we claim, it is the only external regulator or guide that the Church has or can ever need. When mind and conscience are dim, when heart and spirit fail, we are to go to the Bible and to the Bible only, and, with its guidance, follow on to know the Lord.

What, then, are we to do with writings to which we stand in such a relation as that? Well, in the first place, clearly, we must read them, in order to discern their guidance for our faith and life to-day. And we must seek their counsel as a consistent whole, remembering the fact of their development, and not allowing Scripture to cloud Scripture. To confute the teaching of Jesus on the Christian duty of loving our enemies by a quotation from the cursing Psalms is an obvious mishandling of the Word, and yet it is remark-

able how often verses of Scripture are used in that way, without reference to their setting or occasion, or the larger teaching of the Great Authority. To use a Scotticism, we must be on our guard against "snippit" quotations, if we are to use the Bible as our regulator. The proof-texts appended to the various articles in the Westminster Confession afford some rather pathetic examples of the manner in which Scripture may be compelled, against its will, to support a doctrine. The one secure plan for the proper use of Scripture is to enthrone Christ and His teachings, and to relate all the rest to Him. When we do that, we shall find, perhaps to our surprise, how wide are our resources and how rich is our guidance in this inspired library, while, at the same time, we are set free from the difficulties created by contradictions, or by the ethical views of a harsher and more cruel day, before the Sun of Righteousness arose.

To take the Bible as our rule means, then, two things—first that we subjugate its authority to the authority of Christ, and, second, that we do that through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. Now, the latter of these two is

singularly important. It has never been held by us or our ancestors that the Bible is *per se* the Word of God for us. It is the word illuminated by the Holy Spirit that becomes the vital regulator of faith and life, either for a Church or a man. The Westminster divines were quite alive to that, and left no doubt about it in their historic document. To give their own words, they say: "Our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts." Or again, "nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word." Or yet again, "the supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined . . . can be none other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture." These men, manifestly, were far above and beyond the poor mechanical view of the Bible, which has sometimes been presented as theirs, and which, apparently, some misguided people are anxious to foist on the evangelical world again. According to their

strong and understanding teaching, a man or a church must come reverently to the Scriptures, and when the page is illuminated by the Spirit that is indwelling in their minds, so that its truth stands out convincingly and clear, then the Word of God is before them to guide them and set them free. And thus it is that we claim support for the view of the Bible which we maintain to-day. For the Spirit of God is the Spirit of Truth; and all that reverent scholars, by patient study, have learned of the Scriptures is, if it be true, of the Spirit. And the conviction that has come to us that the whole Bible must be referred to Christ and subjugated to Him, is surely of the Spirit. Wherefore, in reverent dependence on God's help, and in steady unflagging love of truth, study the Bible and teach it as a God-aided mind and conscience perceive it to be true, and be not afraid.

But one word of warning is necessary. We must not confuse what we would like to be true with what is true. A man may very easily make his own preferences, or prejudices, or hopes, the discerners of the truth of Scripture. He may mistake the voice of his

own heart for the voice of the Spirit of God—and the end of that way is confusion and thick darkness. I think it is probably fear—a not unreasonable fear—of some such happening as that, that makes the Fundamentalist so suspicious of the discovery of different values in the Bible. It all springs from the frailties of the human heart, he says: far better to take the Bible as it stands, from cover to cover. Indeed, he is pointing to a real danger, and a man who is prepared to take the Bible as his rule must prepare himself to be entirely candid. He must accept its teaching, when he uncomfortably feels in the bones of him that it is true, although it clashes with what he, as a timorous and sinful human being, would like to be true. Take the great instance—take the teaching of Scripture on moral destiny. Every one of us would like to be a Universalist, and to be able to preach that at the last the whole universe must be filled with the spirit of perfect love, and that all rebellion and its dire results shall disappear before the all-embracing conquest of the Saviour. But, while such a hope may indicate our minds, it is plain fact that the

Bible does not teach the necessity or inevitability of complete final restoration. Indeed, it could not teach it, along with its doctrine of the invincible freedom of personality. It is alleged that Mr. Chesterton, in the course of a discussion on retribution, once cried, "I insist on my right to be damned," and, thereby, he struck the nail fairly on the head. So long as a man is a person and free, his ultimate destiny is dependent on his own choice. And what if he chooses ill? Thus, in Scripture, which is so faithful to the facts of human nature, the grim possibilities are not shrouded. Doses of spiritual opium are not given. We are left face to face with the final sombreness, that, until we arise and go unto our Father, we cannot dwell in His home. Our Lord Himself emphasizes the gravity of immediate and present decision, when, with deep urgency, He calls out the one word "strive." And if we, through sentimentality, turn our heads from that recurrent gravity, and, in studying Scripture, will not face the whole of it, we are refusing to allow the spirit to illumine it for our understanding.

But if we get a Church which, willing to

learn, with brave candor searches the Scriptures, corrects its conscience by their standard, and refers back to them in perplexity and doubt, then we have a Church which will never go wrong. At least, as individual men and women, let us so use the Word. For we need guidance so sorely. Life is so pitiable and so hard, our eyes are so dim, our understanding is so clouded by our sin. We need the Word. Let us read and mark it well, and, being ruled thereby, be led into peace.

THE USE OF THE BIBLE

ANY ONE who has been reading some recent books on things Biblical and cognate matters will have noticed that one of the most frequent adjectives used in them is "new," with "modern" running hard for the second place. New views and new angles jostle modern attitudes and modern approaches—although some of them are rather more hoary and less modern than they give themselves out to be. But the total effect on the mind is to create a thirst for something that is satisfactorily ancient; for, after all, the best things are those which have stood the test of time. And we can find what we want, surely, when we come to speak of the use of the Bible. At any rate, I have nothing new to advise, and no "modern" recommendation to make. People have been reading the Bible for quite a while, and have learned much that is valuable about its use. Criticism does not alter the Bible's position as our one external

authority, nor does it dull the voice of God sounding in it. It may help us to avoid the pernicious habit of taking the Scriptures in "snippets": although I doubt (despite proof-texts appended to the Confession) if that was ever a very prevalent habit. The Bible remains what it has always been, the great devotional library of Christendom; and the best thing we can do is to get back to some of the practices of more devotional ages than our own, and by becoming less "modern" become more wise.

And, first, let us reflect on this pearl of wisdom: the best way to use the Bible is to *use* it. There can be no question that we have weakened here on the habits of our fathers. We have allowed ourselves to become the sport and plaything of the "towniness of towns," of a smattering of education, of the cheap printing-press, and of electricity. When everybody can read and imagines he can think; when the telegraph brings the snappiest news of the wide, wide world daily to newspaper offices, and thence, in big headlines, to the breakfast table; when a man can feast on a crisis in the Balkans and a murder in Chicago

in the intervals of following the mournful home-life of Jiggs and Maggie, or the development of Casper's infant; and when he is a bundle of restless nerves at the end of a day spent largely at the telephone, he is not in the frame of mind to move into regions that call for the quiet heart and the meditative mind. It is facts like these that make us question progress. God must be very sorry for city-dwellers, and probably excuses them much. I remember Dr. G. H. Morrison once saying that the wisest type of man he had known was a shepherd. He was not so adaptable mentally as a city-dweller, nor so alert: but he had brooded long and silently, amidst great spaces, on themes of permanent import, and his judgment on moral issues was far deeper and surer. What we need to do is to combine the excellences of the former and the latter days; and I think that in the formation and increase of study-circles we see an encouraging sign that our young people are endeavouring so to do. It would be a definitely retrograde step if the next generation became a people of one book; but it would be worse if they became a people of every book

except one, and that the Bible. Consequently, a purpose of intelligent Bible-reading should be undertaken by all of us. It will require effort, determination and self-discipline; but it is essential if we desire to advance on the generations that were before us. An age that reads the Scripture by an oil lamp is higher in the scale of civilization than an age which only reads the press head-lines by electric light. Our business is to harness the discoveries of applied science to the car of noble learning; and so have in our treasure-house things both new and old.

Now there are three ways in which we can read the Bible. We can read it as literature. We can read it as the subject of detailed study. And we can read it devotionally. As far as in us lies we should endeavour to use all three avenues of approach.

Inasmuch as the Bible is literature—and great literature—we should treat it as such. No doubt this is the least important way in which to regard Scripture; but it should not be overlooked. When we are reading the works of some secular writer, we do not insist on reading only fragments of that

which he meant to be a unity. A play of Shakespeare, for instance, needs to be read through to be properly appreciated. In the same way, the Biblical Library consists of books which, for the most part, are unities and should be read through at a sitting. That especially applies to the writings of St. Paul. The man, who wants to get a grip of the sequence and coherence of the Apostle's message, will sometimes sit down to read his epistles as if they were what they are, namely, letters written to friends in the ordinary course of his pastoral correspondence. Similarly a man should deal with a prophet, although the prophetic writings are not unified in the same way. Especially, it is valuable to read through such a straight story as the Gospel of St. Mark. After all, these books are books; they deal with the most entrancing story in the world; why should we not pay them the compliment of reading them through at a sitting?

If we do, using the while our imagination to get the viewpoint of the writer, two results will follow. First and quickly, we shall come to love and to know a little noble English.

The well of English undefiled is the authorized version. The purest and simplest orator Britain ever had, John Bright, is said scarcely to have used a word that is not to be found within the Bible pages; and, if only this by-product of Biblical reading were gained, we should not have read in vain. The English language is at present in real danger of losing its beauty and its clarity. The speech of public men tends to become slovenly and unlovely; and a generation that returned to the simplicity and grace of Biblical English, in its oratory and in its writing, would deserve well of posterity. Second, we shall be taken into regions of Scripture, which we commonly neglect. The Bible is like the continent of North America; parts of it are "crowded" and familiar, while others are hardly ever touched. But there are great beauties in the unknown places.

For this method of Bible reading two aids are necessary. First, a modern translation, and second, a simple introduction to the book which is being read through—of which there are many amongst the "aids for Bible students." The former suggestion would seem, by the way, to contradict the emphasis just

laid upon the authorized version as the standard for style; but the contradiction is only apparent. In the authorized version there are inevitably certain archaisms which make understanding difficult; and its very familiarity makes it ineffective occasionally in getting into the quick of the mind. Consequently, translations like those of Prof. Moffatt or Prof. Goodspeed are valuable as commentaries, which either bring the meaning quickly out of an archaic word or turn of speech, or direct the mind to a meaning which has become blurred. But let me make a humble protest against the tendency to use these, or any other modern translations, in public worship. I am certain that these distinguished authors never dreamed of them being so used. To hear, say 1 Corinthians 13, given out in church, and then not to hear the noble words in which the loveliness of the hymn of love has been conveyed to so many generations, makes me feel like murder. We welcome gratefully all such translations as aids to Bible study; but if they are to be foisted on us for use in public devotion, I should like to see a law

passed that any one who ever translates the Bible again shall be shot at sight!

In the second place, we should come to the Bible as to a library requiring serious study —in the same way that we approach a text-book in our craft or profession to study it. For this, three assistances are desirable— a commentary, such as those mentioned above; a Bible class, which you will attend and go on attending; and a good, strong power of determination, for some of the study will be dull. The ideal, and it is quite attainable, would be for us all to make up our minds to master one book a year, so that at the end of the year we shall know about the life and times of its author, the circumstances which caused him to write, the sequence and development of his argument and message and the problems which his book creates as well as explains. If ever we study a book in that way, we shall assuredly find it to become living and amazingly interesting; for the study of the Scriptures always creates a delight in them. The Bible is a dull book only to those who will not look beneath its surface. Some

of the process of digging may be wearisome, but the result is true pleasure.

Now, study of the Bible in this way depends on Bible classes, and Bible classes depend on the people. Do not go blaming your minister. Nothing will give him greater satisfaction than to find a deputation from his young people asking him to give up social evenings in favour of a study of the Epistle to the Philippians, or, preferably, to keep the social evening and add the study. If such requests came all over the land there would be such cheery Christmases in our manses as have never been known. And, after all, why should they not? We are at a supreme moment in the history of the Christian Church—a moment when we may expect the unexpected. We are all anxious to serve, we cannot serve better than by informing ourselves about God's Word, and thus creating the atmosphere in which others will be anxious to be informed. That eccentric genius, the poet-artist, William Blake, once justly observed: "Let every Christian, as much as in him lies, engage himself openly and publicly, before all the world, in some mental pursuit for the building up of

Jerusalem." We cannot build Jerusalem unless we engage in what the same poet calls "mental fight"; and there is no mental fight more profitable than wrestling for an understanding of the Scriptures.

And third, and chiefly, we must use the Bible devotionally; through it we must practise the presence of God. For it is thus that the Bible is a direct means of grace and becomes for us the word of Life. Upon that, there is little to be said. Its devotional purpose is so clear; its assistance in the regions eternal is so manifest; the voice of God in its pages is so insistent, that no man can deny that he may use it devotionally, if only he will. Wise and simple, learned and unlearned, meet there on common ground; wayfaring men shall not err if they seek God in His Word. In this busy—as some of us may think, this over-busy—world, some people have hardly the time for much study; but all have time, if they will make it, to spend a little space each morning reading a familiar verse and thinking over it. "If you have only three minutes a day to give to Bible reading, spend one minute in reading and two in thinking over

what you have read in God's presence." So wrote Principal Rainy to his son in India; and the advice is golden. As we read generally and at large in the Scriptures we should mark those passages which seem to have something to do with our own hearts and lives. Our marked passages become the Word of God for us; and these can be the passages which we can call to mind as each day begins or ends. A phrase from a verse will suffice. "The Lord is my shepherd"—a man does not need to go farther into that sunny little "mother's psalm" to have enough to think over before he sets out to his daily task. And, if each day, he lets some such tender passage lead him into the presence of God, to stand there while reverently at gaze, slowly he will grow in power, slowly he will gain the peace which the world cannot give—nor take away.

I give you the end of a golden string,
Only wind it into a ball,
It will lead you in at Heaven's gate,
Built in Jerusalem's wall.

Ah! life is so sore a struggle. The enemies of our soul are so seldom left dead upon the field. Myself am so continually a traitor to

myself. We need, and we know we need, all the help we can discover. And here it is, ample to sustain, sufficient to guide, in the Word of God. If we neglect it we neglect it at our peril; but if we use it, it will be to us, as to the generations before us, a power unto salvation.

THE FINAL AUTHORITY

THE final authority for religious belief is the authority of personal experience. It is one thing to say, "I believe that Jesus can restore sight, because I have been told so by reliable witnesses": but it is another to say "whereas I was blind, now I see." That man, in the familiar story, had no dubiety as to the power of the Master, for the best of reasons. Wherefore, as we come to the conclusion of these brief studies, let us consider for a moment that ultimate ground of confidence, which the Bible itself indicates to be ultimate. For, in the last instance, the Bible is of supreme value because it is so potent a means whereby a man may learn for himself, in the experience of his own heart, the healing power of God.

Now, religious experience is a very varied, subtle and spiritual thing; and about it we may, with painful facility, make mistakes. A man may possess it and never know that he

possesses it: while, on the other hand, he may, and often does, mistake the effects of mob psychology for the real thing. The very name of it renders certain types of mind suspicious: and some of the best and most honest feel that it should scarcely be spoken of, for it dwells in the deeps of those hearts which reticent people do not wear on their sleeves.

Nevertheless, the Scriptures are full of it. They continually point to it as the *sine qua non* of confidence, and so necessarily inwrought with the upward movement of the soul. "Ye must be born again:" "this is life eternal that they may know Thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou hath sent"—there is no limit to the quotations which could be made, which presuppose an experience of the most vital kind. And the life stories of the Gospels and Acts are no less emphatic: above all, there is the classic case of Paul; although here a word of warning is needed. There has been a tendency to standardize the conversion of Paul, as if religious experience could take no form but his. "There are as many religions as there are men," some one has remarked, not untruly: certainly, re-

ligious experience is an individual thing; and to say that we must all pass through a sudden, catastrophic change, like Paul, is to say that we are all made in his heroic mould. As a matter of fact, Paul was somewhat superior to the rest of us: and we are not to expect that we shall react to the sudden pressure of God on us precisely in the same way as that mighty captain in God's armies. Still, in some form, a religious awakening or awareness seems to be assumed as possible for us all: it is implied in the Apostle's prayer that we may be able to comprehend *with all saints:* and it is, therefore, our most serious business to enquire whether, and to what extent, we can make the demand for it universal.

In the first place, the fact hits us in the eye that if religious experience is the mark of all saints, it is the possession of singularly diverse people. Have you ever thought how remarkable are the specimens to whom the term "saint" is applied in the New Testament? There are, of course, the standard types. There is Abraham, the solitary friend of, and adventurer for, God: there is Enoch, who so habitually and natively practised God's pres-

ence, that to pass to "the perfect vision of His face, which we, for want of words, call heaven," scarce broke the even tenor of his way: there is David, at once sinner, penitent, warrior, poet and religious genius: there is Peter, unstable and impetuous, but golden in the deep heart of him: there is the Magdalene, life's butterfly, winning nobility through a world of tears: and there is John, pure of heart and great of vision. But with these there are others. There is, for instance, Jacob—as mean a scab as ever took advantage of an old man's blindness and a brother's trust; a man who needed a soul-inverting conversion before he could become a Prince in Israel. Above all, read again that queer list of parti-colored saints in Hebrews 11:32 (who are bracketed, if you please, with Samuel and the prophets), Samson, Barak and Jephthah. Think of Samson, the sport and plaything of a minx, who only recovered his manhood when, in one wild effort, he brought death crashing down on himself as on his oppressors. Think of Jephthah, that cheerful and bloody-handed brigand, who would think nothing of slitting a throat or two before breakfast, entered into the roll of God's

honor, because he lived up to the good he knew, and having paid his vow unto the Lord, could not go back. They are a mixed bag, surely: but they are all engrossed in the noblest of lists, and are given right to the noblest of names. And the point for us to observe is that religious experience must be a something which can be shared by temperaments and personalities as distinct and separate as these. The Johns and the Peters, the Samsons and the Jephthahs still exist. Each needs to tread his own path to come to God; but there must, surely, be something which they can all know and feel in common—some experience which appeals to the heart beneath the heart of each: and we have to ask ourselves if we can state that common denominator in Christian terms.

Will any man deny that he sees for himself the loveliness of Jesus Christ? We are not concerned for the moment, about theologizings, but only with the impact of that shining life upon our minds. The sunlight is gracious to eyes that know nothing about the solar system. It falls on the grass and gives sparkle as of gems to the dew; it displays the freshness of the morning and the sad

beauty of the evening, when the day withdraws slowly as if loath to lay her loveliness to rest; it gives us on a winter morning a symbol of the purity of heaven. Who does not love the sunlight? And who does not catch the beauty of the Dayspring from on high, when He visits us? Who does not discern the excellence of Jesus? Well, that is religious experience.

Moreover, when we stand face to face with Christ, whose conscience is at ease? We *know* we fall short—how short, alas! we know not. And, in the stirring of conscience we are directly aware of God. If anything in this world is religious experience, it is to be found in the moments when conscience is awake—that conscience which is the clear, authentic voice of God. Even as in times past He spake to our fathers, so precisely He speaks to us, when, standing at gaze upon Christ, our hearts tell us that we have sinned. And, inwrought with that, there comes the continual allurement of the beauty and goodness of the Lord, with its consequent and most divinely-inspired discontent with anything less than Himself.

> For ah! the Master is so fair,
> So sweet His smile to banished men,
> That they who meet Him unaware
> Can never rest on earth again.

And all this is religious experience—definite, reformative, vital. The "needs-must" love of the highest, when we see it, stirs conscience: and conscience will not let us go, but gives us, as its most gracious gift, a restlessness, a longing and a desire which toss us back upon His breast—in all of which we are dealing directly with God and He with us. And forth from the distress so caused there comes, surely, a turning to His love, in its strength and completeness and tenderness, and an open ear to His offer of forgiveness, cleansing and friendship. We see His beauty reaching its height in its pain, and the Christ of the Cross comes near. We need love and help so sorely that, with a kind of desperate hope, we lift our eyes to the love that is measured only by death. And then, again, conscience is stirred; we know that there are two things we ought to do: we ought to make a definite decision of discipleship and we ought to seek, and to go on seeking, for the nearness of His presence.

Once again, we are dealing directly with God: once again His voice echoes in the courts and chambers of the heart.

Now, is it too much to claim that such is the experience of every one who has heard the Christian word? Think over it carefully: let us question ourselves, candidly, intimately. Does the excellence of Christ appear excellent to us? Face it: answer it. Are you prepared to criticize Him, to belittle Him? Will you stand up before the people and say that, to your eyes, He has no beauty that we should desire Him? If He were to come into the room would you, as Charles Lamb said he would be impelled to do, kneel down and kiss the hem of His garment; or would you turn from Him with a neglectful wave of the hand? Answer it, I say. Ah! we should cover our faces, our eyes blinded by the whiteness of His light; and our hearts would ache with shame and longing, just as they do ache when we permit ourselves to remember Him. And is there restlessness in that spirit of yours—a restlessness that will not be assuaged—a queer, insistent restlessness like a homesickness of the soul, when the thought of Him and all His

love comes back? And do we not know full well that we *ought,* once and for all, to fling ourselves on His side and make ourselves His men for ever? Do we not know that we neglect approach to God at our peril? Face the thing: let the answer be made. Nothing but stark honesty will do in a matter so momentous. Nor is there any doubt about the reply: which enables us to say that we have had experience of religion; that we have passed, for a moment beyond the poor realm of time and space into the region of the things that are real.

But this is only the beginning. Religious experience is in part a reward, but it is also in part a spur. We must act on the impulses that conscience gives, or our religious sight will fade. Everything depends on action now. "Prevenient grace," as our fathers would say, has been at work: but now we must work out our own salvation, because it is God that worketh in us. Many men are living in a pitiable contentment, smiling at the exuberances of the religions, and disbelieving in the whole thing as the by-product of unbalanced nervous systems, because long ago they failed to act on the religious experience they once

possessed. They, despite their success and apparent placidity, are life's real tragedies—men to whom the door was open once, but who closed it themselves. But if a man acts when he has the chance, and throws the will in one decisive movement on the God-side in him, and sets himself daily to seek a deeper knowledge, gifts rich and rare are added unto him. Slowly, imperceptibly, he grows into a firmer belief in the reality and the power of the love of God: slowly, imperceptibly his own spirit grows in strength, until he becomes content with one day at a time, leaving yesterday and to-morrow in his Father's hands, and finding himself, almost unconsciously, carrying burdens which once would have broken him; until at last his conviction is based on something very deep and unquestioning, like a child's trust in his father's love and in his right to a place in his own home. In the apostle's fine word, he is "persuaded"; and nothing, here or anywhere, can disturb him from his rest.

Ah, well! few of us have that final authority to rest on as we should. But we have a little, surely. God has not been this long time with us that we have not known Him at all. And

of this we may be certain, that, if we mean business, our direct confidence will grow, until at last faith vanishes into sight and we know even also as we are known. Meantime, to aid and to inspire, we have the Bible, with the irrefragable testimony therein contained, which is the witness of the saints.

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